The Effectiveness Challenge: Can we do better homelessness prevention?

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What is Homelessness Prevention?

Efforts to help low income households resolve a financial and/or housing crisis that would otherwise lead to a loss of housing.

What is Homelessness Prevention?

Homelessness prevention efforts may include financial assistance, housing-related support services, legal assistance, discharge planning or all of these.

Effective prevention may stabilize a household in their current housing or help them to move to new housing without requiring they become literally homeless or pass through the shelter system first in order to receive help.

The Crux of the Matter: Efficiency and Effectiveness

"It is relatively easy to offer prevention activities, but difficult to develop an effective community-wide strategy. Such a prevention strategy needs to offer *effective* prevention activities and do so *efficiently*."

Effectiveness and Efficiency (cont.)

"Effective activities must be capable of stopping someone from becoming homeless or ending their homelessness quickly.

An *efficient system* must target well, delivering its effective activities to people who are very likely to become homeless unless they receive help." (Burt et al. 2007, p.xvii, italics in original)

What's found to be effective?

Burt et al. (2007) identified five effective prevention activities: housing subsidies, supportive services coupled with permanent housing, mediation in housing courts, cash assistance for rent or mortgage, and rapid exit from shelter.

(Several of these are "secondary and tertiary" prevention.)

What about efficiency?

"Any agency may use effective prevention activities, alone or in combination, and will probably prevent some homelessness. But prevention resources are unlikely to be used *efficiently* unless they are part of a larger structure of planning and organization *that address the issue of targeting.*"

(Burt et al. 2007, p.xxiii)

The Prevention Targeting Dilemma

The more prevention assistance is targeted to people who seem to us to be able to make it with very limited assistance, the less likely it is we are actually reaching people who would become homeless without our assistance.

Challenge: Evictions don't *necessarily* lead to homelessness

- Shinn et. al found that only 20% of families that received eviction notices went on to be homeless: 80% did not

- Shinn also found that only 22% of families entering homeless shelters had ever had an eviction

- 44% of families entering shelter had never had their own apartment

(This is an old study, 1998 – good thing to look at locally)

People who approach our programs may not be at most immediate risk

Boston Foundation study (2007) compared results of those who received one-time assistance with those who were turned down because program was out of funds:

- 71% of people who were <u>not</u> assisted retained their housing

- 79% of people who <u>were</u> assisted retained their housing

 Study did find that those households not assisted continued to be "unstable"

Typical "Targeting" is unlikely to reach the right people

- The primary prevention assistance provider in Redwood City (San Mateo County, CA) collected data on those they assisted and those not-assisted with prevention assistance

- Prevention assistance followed traditional guidelines (one time, must have eviction notice, must show can retain housing afterwards)

- Most common reason for being refused assistance was not having adequate ongoing income (i.e. *too poor)*

Comparing those assisted and not…

- We compared the largest prevention providers' database with the largest shelter provider in the same geographic region over a three year period

- Results showed a negligible difference in shelter entry rates over three years for those who received and those who were denied the prevention assistance

Comparison of Shelter entry rates: assisted versus non-assisted

	Applied for Prevention assistance	Entered Shelter w/in 3 year window	% that entered shelter
Households that were turned down for prevention assistance	1019	40	3.9%
Households that received prevention assistance	243	12	4.9%
Total	1262	52	4.1%

The "Aha!"

- Without the data on those turned away we would assume we have a 5% homeless entry rate for those assisted: looks like we are doing pretty good at preventing homelessness!

- With the data we see we that we may not be effectively preventing homelessness; don't seem to be reaching the people who actually become homeless
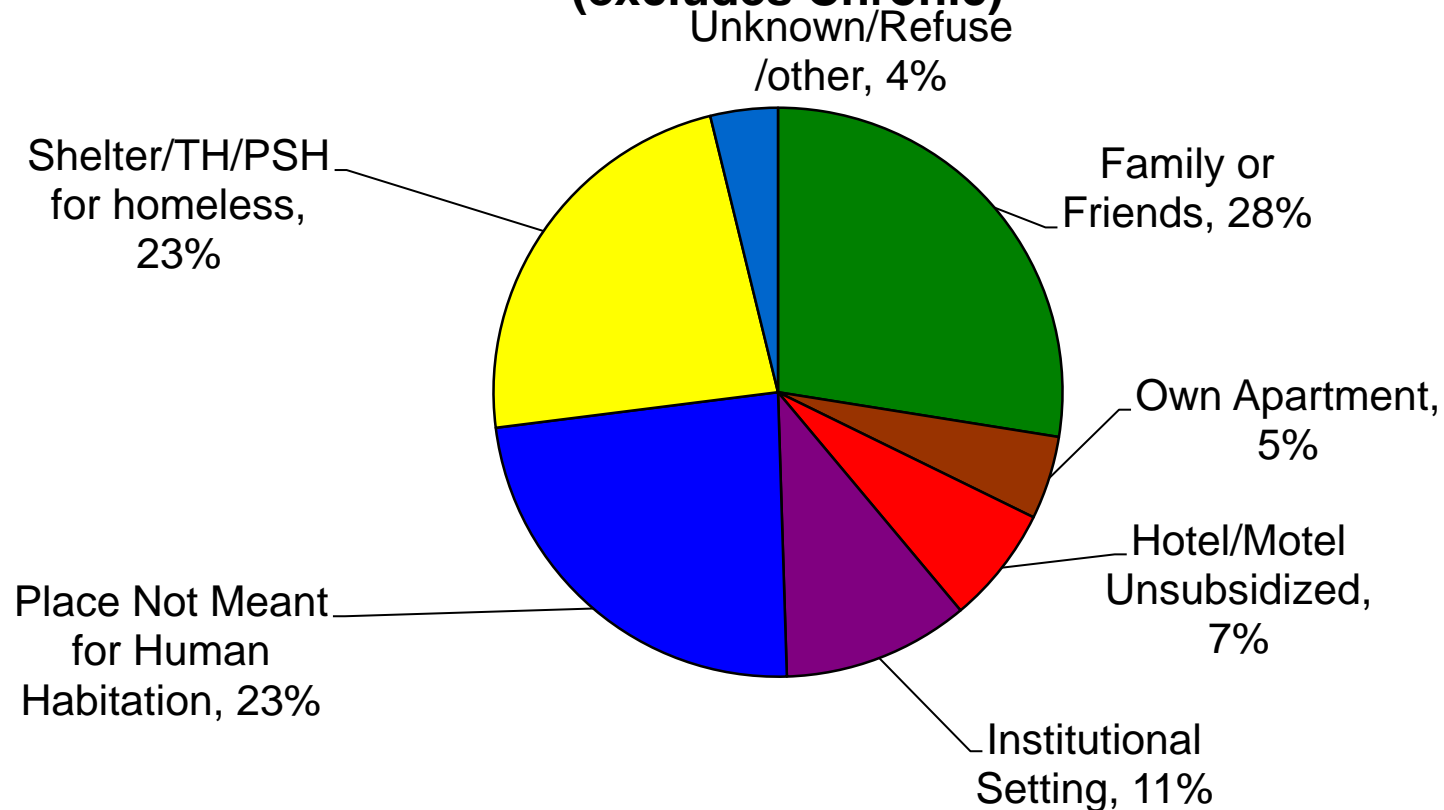
So, how do we find the people who *will* become homeless?

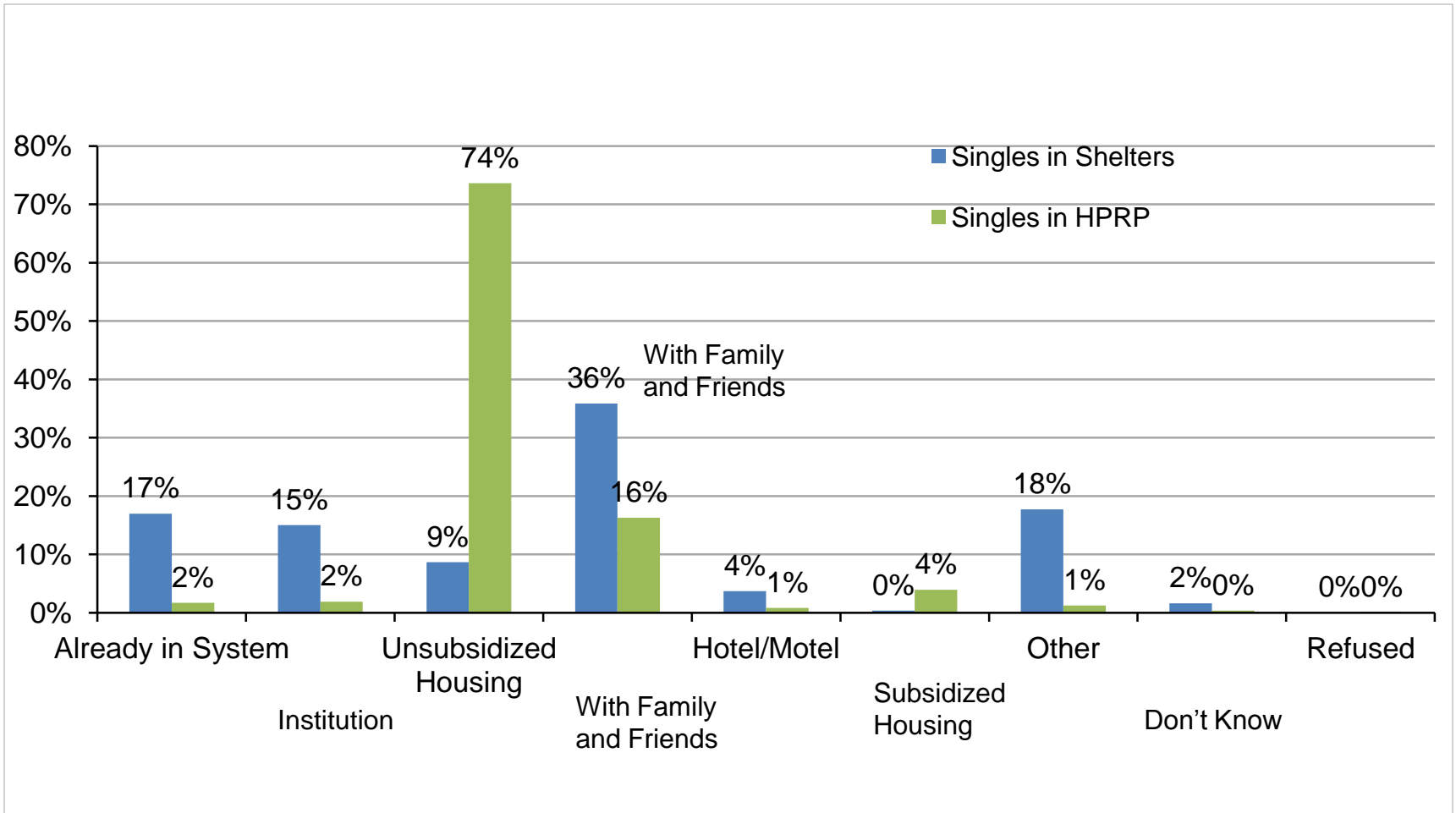Short answer is: we don't fully know... Yet... but we've got some ideas

- Look at data!

HMIS data for shelter entry

Where Sheltered People Spent Last 7 Days before Entry (excludes Chronic)

- Unknown/Refuse/other, 4%
- Family or Friends, 28%
- Own Apartment, 5%
- Hotel/Motel Unsubsidized, 7%
- Institutional Setting, 11%
- Place Not Meant for Human Habitation, 23%
- Shelter/TH/PSH for homeless, 23%

Comparative Entry Analysis

Chart legend: Singles in Shelters (blue), Singles in HPRP (green)

Category	Singles in Shelters	Singles in HPRP
Already in System	17%	2%
Institution	15%	2%
Unsubsidized Housing	9%	74%
With Family and Friends	36%	16%
Hotel/Motel	4%	1%
Subsidized Housing	0%	4%
Other	18%	1%
Don't Know	2%	0%
Refused	0%	0%

Other data on sheltered households in HMIS

- Income amounts
- Income Sources
- Prior Shelter stays
- Age of Head of Household
- Pregnancy
- Age of Children/number of children
- Education Level of head of household

Other data on sheltered households

Hennepin County did this for families

- Sheltered and prevention families looked similar in terms of including felony history, limited English proficiency, and disability status

- **Income:** 40 percent of families getting prevention assistance had incomes below $1,000 per month compared with 94 percent of those who entered shelter, (approximately 70 percent had incomes below $500 per month.)

- **Percent of Income toward Housing**: 44 percent of families who received prevention assistance were paying more than 65 percent of their income toward housing, compared with 94 percent of those entering shelter.

Other data on sheltered households

- **History of Homelessness**: 36 percent of households receiving prevention assistance had previously experienced homelessness, compared with 63 percent of sheltered households.

- **Young Families:** Among sheltered families, nearly one-third of all heads of household were under age 22; among households receiving prevention assistance, however, the figure was only one percent.

 Hennepin changed its screening tool to reflect these things; their success rate has not changed but they think they are hitting more families likely to become homeless

Other data: Client Interviews

- Patterns of homelessness and service usage

- Awareness of assistance

- Past prevention assistance use

Things learned from interviews with families in shelter in Alameda County

- Most reported having stayed with family or friends prior to recognizing a need to seek help
- All had some past or current relationship to TANF but only two had been assisted by TANF prevention program
- Few knew of any prevention assistance or the 211 hot line:
- Those few who had called were not successful in getting prevention assistance.
- None would have qualified for our one-time rental assistance because they could not show they had enough income to sustain their housing

Deeper comparative analysis may yield more promising tools

- ***LATE BREAKING NEWS!*** Homebase study (NYC program) has developed what looks like a better predictive model for New York.

- Factors may not be transferable but process is!

- Researchers presenting at conference in LA Feb 9-10.

The really hard part of all this…

- Once we narrow our targeting we have to learn to "Just say No!"

- Losing housing is bad…. but becoming homeless is worse: Limited resources means hard decisions.

Sizing Assistance

- Even if we get the right(er) people, how should we size the assistance?

- Always provide the "least for the least" – least amount of assistance for the least amount of time

- Can always do more… if needed: Progressive engagement model

How much else to do?

- No evidence of "dose response" to services.

- Let them identify what they need and help them get that.

- Instead of worrying you're "setting them up to fail" set them up to succeed.

- Be the Trampoline!

Where should prevention happen?

- Culhane says converge on the front door: Diversion

- Some experiments in place-based targeting... Inconclusive.

- If going upstream, have to open wider funnels and say "No" more.

Dudley Diversion Pilot

69 Participating Families
29 Families (42%) Diverted from Shelter
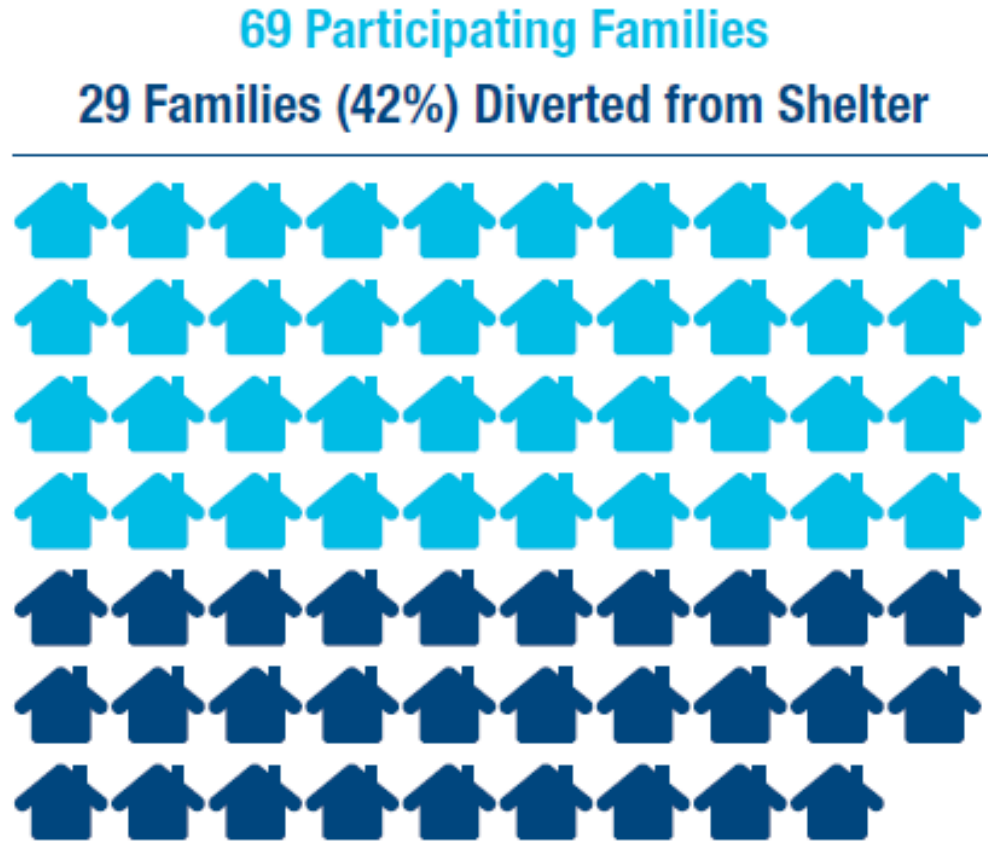
Two months, one staff person, $50,000; 11 stabilized in own housing; 10 identified friends or family; eight bypassed shelter to a better fit.

Next step: how can we make this someone else's problem?

- TANF: either do it or pay for it –(in terms of families, it's largely their problem.)

- Many healthcare funders get "prevention" concept, get them on board

- Alcohol and drug treatment programs- Help them plan, don't "enable" them.

- Foster care – programs and advocacy

Questions and Discussion